

**CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE AS SANITIZED**

*18 SEPT 75*

**TITLE:** The Libyan As Agent

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**VOLUME:** 7    **ISSUE:** Winter    **YEAR:** 1963

# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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*A psychological framework to guide the handling of a special personality.*

## THE LIBYAN AS AGENT

Titus Leidesdorf

Any attempt to characterize all members of a society in common is necessarily a stereotype, subject to error in individual application. This study of the Libyan personality in relation to intelligence operations cannot be made a Procrustean bed on which to scale every Libyan nor a basis for challenging a case officer's assessment of his particular agent. But if the Chinese are devoted to their families, the Italians to their wine, the French to their loves, and the Irish to their sod, then the generalities in this study have some such applicability. For [REDACTED] the old hand embarking on a new development, the characteristics described here should afford a useful frame of reference.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Libyan Personality*

The typical Libyan is an outward-looking individual, acutely aware of other people, of events, of social pressures, demands, and obligations; and he has difficulty concentrating on any one event because there are too many other things competing for his attention. He respects and admires intellectual achievement, and he accordingly makes a particular effort to acquire and retain information. But he lacks the intellectual discipline to do very much with it. He is like a tape recorder, absorbing masses of information uncritically without integration and depending on his ability to play them back to achieve status among his fellows. It is more im-

<sup>1</sup> The study is based on an analysis of psychological tests administered to 100 Libyan workers at Wheelus Air Force Base in January 1962, augmented by social contacts and interviews with several educated Tripolitanians and discussions with American officers and supervisors who have lived and dealt with Libyans for periods from several months to several years.

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## *The Libyan*

portant to him to "know" something than to be productive, creative, or skillful.

He is likewise conscious of the rules and procedures inculcated by his culture and experience, but also of conditioning circumstances which affect the application of the rules, so that while he thinks in terms of rules he tends to be inconsistent in applying them. He has a tolerance for ambiguity and for rationalization; he can "stretch" circumstances to justify an action. His behavior thus is governed more by reference points than by absolute dicta, and it is seldom predictable; one can know the factors bearing on his decisions but not the precise way in which he will rationalize or resolve them.

In interpersonal relations he tends to suppress spontaneous feelings and intuition in favor of an examined and deliberated behavior. He tends to be suspicious and defensive, to "second-guess" what is going on, and so to respond in a controlled and calculated way. When he acts angry or charming, it may be only because he thinks that's the way he should act at the moment. Much of the time he is trying to be something that he is not and behaving in ways different from the way he feels. Beneath the superficial expression his attitude may be a negative one of social insulation or withdrawal.

Acutely aware of the group, the family, the mass, and the heritage of which they are a part, many Libyans struggle to assert their individual identity. This defensive individualism, coupled with suspiciousness and negativism, makes them poor candidates for effective organization and group effort—the more so since their tendency to rationalize and examine alternatives makes it difficult for them to focus on a simple program or a collective course of action. They do, however, have a capacity for loyalty, particularly of the personal variety based on the satisfaction of recognition and acceptance by an admired leader. This loyalty is dependent on continuous justification and reinforcement, being particularly frangible in the face of rejection, humiliation, or "unfairness."

Much that the Libyan does is determined by the immediate situation—by the need to take care of whatever is going on at the moment. He can make a commitment for the future

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because that's what's required at the present; whether he fulfills it will depend on the conditions that prevail at that future time. He will cross that bridge when he gets to it.

*The Worker*

The ordinary Libyan workers have a low general level of effective intelligence. The overwhelming majority are illiterate, and the average worker is a man who, given the opportunity, at best might struggle through the sixth grade. As a trainee, moreover, he comes from a technically impoverished culture and lacks the general mechanical conditioning which is part of the growing-up experience of the Westerner. He has no basis for filling in the most elementary gaps in instruction. He can not be expected to do things on the basis of "common sense," since he has had no opportunity to acquire it in technical matters. Together with his capacity to find exceptions to the rules, this deficiency can lead to serious problems. He can fail to carry out a known action solely because something is the wrong color, or because it's Thursday, or because he "didn't see it" or "you didn't tell me this time."

He also lacks any preconditioning in the employment relationship of a sort to make him understand the simplest obligations and expectations taken for granted by the Westerner on even his first job. He is likely to feel that his obligations are fulfilled merely by being hired or by being present. Partly out of self-assertion and partly through naiveté, me-too-ism is a large factor in his expectations. If his co-worker is ill for three days, he feels entitled to three days of sick leave, too; and if someone is granted a bonus for some special effort, he feels he should have the same reward, on the grounds that he would have done just as well if asked. Sustained production is a particular area in which the Libyan worker does not share the American's sense of value. The fact that he is able to do so much work in so much time carries no assurance that he will. His failure is not necessarily perversity; it is partly due to distractability, partly to unawareness of what is expected, and partly to ineffective self-organization.

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## *The Libyan*

### *The Avant Garde*

The elite rising middle class of educated and substantially more intelligent young Libyans differ from their poorer, lower-status countrymen largely in being confused at a higher level.<sup>2</sup> They are greatly concerned about their futures, their diverse and manifold opportunities, and their uncertainties. They are thoroughly immersed in an uncertain effort to break away from the "old" and to embrace the "new" and thereby heavily involved in an intellectual and emotional conflict of serious proportions. They are militantly individualistic and anxious to carve out a unique and independent existence, one of the criteria of which is to "make a million."

This young elite reflects at its level the workers' hyper-awareness and distractability, omnivorous but undisciplined intellect, avoidance of simplicity in favor of rationalization and the perusal of alternatives, capacity for superficial, controlled expression and emotion, pursuit of independence and individuality at the expense of group identification and group effort, and unwillingness (if not inability) to be consistently productive in any one direction. With all their need to be individuals, they have an equal need for emotional support from outside, for someone to depend upon, to guide them, to accept and understand them.

Americans are attractive to these people (albeit with substantial ambivalence) if only because they personify so thoroughly the New World to which they aspire in contrast to the Old Order from which they seek to escape. But their desire to change their ways and their recognition of the need to change is exceeded only by their awareness of the essential sinfulness of trying to change. This conflict brings an earnestness, an eagerness, a sense of illicit passion to their

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<sup>2</sup>It is important to note the severe limitations of the sample on which these generalizations are based: the investigator met some 30 of these avant-garde Tripolitanians and had lengthy conversations with perhaps half a dozen. Undoubtedly these were all "selected," in some way or other, by various factors—common friends or sources of introduction, a more or less common milieu which may or may not represent the "true" society of rising middle-class young adults, and other fortuitous circumstances which brought them into view. Nevertheless, as with the worker sample, the consistency of their psychological pattern was so marked as to encourage broad generalization.

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intercultural relationships. They will approach new relationships with trepidation even as they adopt new ways with a vengeance; much that they learn will be superficial; much of their behavior will be a veneer; much of their enthusiasm will carry with it an underlayer of guilt or shame or at least uncertainty as to what they should be about.

It is virtually impossible to deal with such people superficially. Befriending a Libyan is much like acquiring a mistress: once the cautious, tentative, defensive sparring is over, the relationship grows progressively deeper, broader, more involving, more consuming, more demanding. While the affair can be gratifying, it will rarely be tranquil; and there is always the risk that the wrong word, the wrong deed, the wrong interpretation will bring everything to an abrupt halt or a precipitous reversal.

#### *Operational Implications: Mass Action*

As we have seen, the Libyan is generally not an Organization Man. He is too individualistic, suspicious, diffuse with respect to goals, and vague about the mechanics of organization. A group of Libyans, endeavoring as peers to organize themselves for some purpose, could well start out with the notion of a common task, but they would soon be overwhelmed by alternative courses of action, competing organizational proposals, and wrangling for leadership. A strong natural leader could impose organization and direction; but the group's effectiveness would depend almost entirely on his ability to perpetuate his control by commanding loyalty on the basis of individual, man-to-man relationships.

A respected outsider gifted with organizational know-how and capitalizing on admiration for intellectual prowess and achievement could similarly infuse organization into a Libyan group if he could keep all of the administrative reins in his own hands. Such a master-minded group would ordinarily be vastly more effective than any which Libyans could create on their own, and Libyans on their own would have great difficulty countering it. By way of corollary, it is reasonably safe, when any well organized and systematically effective Libyan group ostensibly chances to emerge, to infer that it has some outside direction.

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## *The Libyan*

Inability to organize effectively does not imply that Libyans will not organize at all. In view of their susceptibility to charismatic leadership—especially when the appeal is intellectual as well as sensory and emotional—it is not difficult to imagine a Libyan mob. But it is one thing to precipitate a mob, another to energize and direct it, and still another to contain and control it. A Libyan mob would be like a herd of cattle—a collection of individuals rather than a real social force; physically imposing and threatening, but individually rather docile, controlled, and even cowardly; capable of stampeding, but also able to be deflected; incapable of any really sustained collective action; and quite likely to scatter itself aimlessly and dissolve into its component parts as other needs, interests, and attractions came to attention. Such a mob is at best a limited and unreliable tactical weapon, and no basis for any real social or political reorientation.

In general, Libyans are particularly susceptible to demagogic leadership, the strong emotional appeal which plays upon generalized hostility, sensed oppression, etc. But under such stimulation they are more likely to be whipped into negative action than positive. They have a greater capacity to destroy what exists than to create something better.

### *Use of Nets*

With respect to ordinary intelligence operations, whenever there is a choice between handling Libyans as individuals and using them in teams or groups the individual approach is vastly more desirable. Both the operational direction and the personnel handling are much more difficult in the group. It is possible to make use of natural groups, pre-existing cultural organizations like the family where control of the head implies a degree of established control over the members; but in general it is more realistic to think of Libyans as singletons than as nets, as surveillants than as surveillance teams, etc.

Except for such natural groups, any attempt to use Libyans in pairs, nets, or teams for a group effort invites a host of difficulties. The principal basis for motivation and control is a direct personal relationship between the trusted case officer

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and the Libyan agent, and anything which makes this relationship less direct makes for more difficulty in handling.

Employed together, Libyan agents will be suspicious of each other and jealous of their positions vis-à-vis the case officer. Each will be out for all he can get, and in the ensuing competition he will expend more energy quibbling over his proper due than in accomplishing his tasks. The case officer will be continually harassed to render reassurance to each one in turn and will find it virtually impossible to set rewards or assign tasks on the basis of merit and capability. A good analogy is that of a man with several wives, each demanding assurance that she is Number One.

When a relationship has been established with a Libyan, any effort to impose another in the chain of command, whether as a principal agent or as a cut-out, invites disaster. At the least it creates a threat to the original agent's sense of identification and personal security; if he doesn't lose all of his motivation, he will at least make efforts to re-establish personal contact, meanwhile nursing his jealousy, mistrust, humiliation, and feeling of inferiority.

#### *Handling the Singleton*

Working with the singleton Libyan does not eliminate the problems, but it makes it possible to handle them individually. The Libyan's relationship to the case officer will be a very personal one; the case officer may take an objective and business-like view of it, but the Libyan won't, even if he makes it look that way. The fact that the relationship exists means that the Libyan is bringing to it a large capacity for personal dependency in his need of guidance and support, and also his personal loyalty, eagerness, enthusiasm, and his version of conscientiousness—together with all the negative corollaries of jealousy, suspicion, sensed rejection, humiliation, and general sensitivity.

At any particular moment the most important thing to the Libyan is to maintain the relationship at the most satisfying level. Hence his enthusiasm and willingness to agree to anything that is asked of him; and hence also his propensity to conceal any failures and if necessary to lie in order to de-

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### *The Libyan*

liver what he thinks the case officer wants. In both circumstances, he is responding to what is most important to him, now.

While his capacity to reach agreement and understanding, now, is thus very high, his capacity to carry out what he has agreed to do is likely to be less; and it is conditioned not only by his real abilities but also by the "now" requirements and relationships when the time comes for action. When he is engaged in his operational tasks the pressure of the immediate situation is much stronger than that of the requirements laid upon him earlier. He has a new set of personal relationships to maintain, and he may find that the circumstances aren't "exactly" as expected and therefore the prescribed rules and guidance aren't "exactly" applicable. Then in reporting back to his case officer he is again disposed to make the review as pleasant as possible. At the very least he will be able to rationalize any failure to perform the task as intended; at worst he may fabricate the procedures, the conditions, and the results.

It should not be construed that the Libyan agent is therefore a pathological liar, or intentionally evasive, or wilfully negativistic or misleading. On the contrary, he is enthusiastic and conscientious in his way; but he is not objective, practical, or self-disciplined. Thus he can overcommit himself, partly out of eagerness and partly because he is ignorant of or defensive about his own limitations. In carrying out his tasks he is susceptible to distraction and deflection, and he is particularly a creature of the circumstances in which he finds himself. Thus it is unfair to expect that he will do things wrong in any intentional sense, but it is appropriate to expect that if something can go wrong it probably will. The case officer has accordingly a more than ordinary need to appraise his agent's skills and abilities and to evaluate the conditions under which any operational task is going to be performed. The reliability of the agent will depend in large measure on the case officer's ability to judge independently whether he can reasonably be expected to perform this task under these circumstances.

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Obviously, the Libyan agent needs particularly detailed guidance and direction. One of the case officer's continuing obligations will be to impress him with the need to carry out tasks precisely in accordance with detailed agreement. He needs step-by-step procedural instruction and direction, since he has neither the background nor the particular kind of mental discipline necessary to think through practical problems in a logical, productive manner on his own.

The Libyan agent has an unusual capacity for sensing exceptions, nuances, ambiguities, etc. as reasons why he shouldn't do something and as justification for his failures. He does not share his case officer's system of values with respect to obligations, commitments, productivity, or objectivity: for him a learned procedure is not necessarily a blueprint for action, an agreement to do something is not necessarily a commitment to carry it out, failure to carry out an agreement is not necessarily a source of guilt or anxiety (particularly when there is some "reason" for it), and lying about a failure is not necessarily bad, but rather can be construed as a social propriety, an extension of the little white lies which universally lubricate social communication and keep people from getting mad at each other.

#### *Operational Characteristics*

The Libyan is a good observer in that he is very much aware of things that are going on around him. He is an omnivorous spectator, with a natural ability to remember events which he has witnessed. He has also acquired a sense of the value of knowledge and thus will make some effort to acquire information which enables him to look knowledgeable. But while he can absorb and retain information, he is less able to organize or interpret it or to use it effectively to govern his own actions. Thus he can participate in activities without necessarily understanding what is going on, or he may actually misunderstand what is going on. By the same token, while he is capable of absorbing details, he may be dependent on others to impart meaning to them.

His reporting, accordingly, is likely to be accurate as to detail but confused or misleading as to context, organization, and over-all meaning. If someone else has made an interpreta-

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## *The Libyan*

tion for him, however, he is likely to be accurate in relaying that. For example: His report of a political rally is likely to be accurate with respect to who was there and what was said. This may be inconsistent with his interpretation of the implications of the meeting; but this interpretation may, in turn, be an accurate report of something which was said there, or of something told him by way of explanation.

His efforts to assess other persons are particularly subject to error, especially when there is room for coloration through the influence of loyalty, suspicion, or other source of bias.

The Libyan should have little difficulty, relative to his individual mental level, learning the mechanics and procedures of clandestinity; but his ability to learn them does not imply rigor or discipline in applying them. There are few substitutes for out-and-out conditioning, in the purest Pavlovian sense, to insure that he will carry through a particular procedure under a particular set of circumstances: his training should be practical, repetitious, and continuous in this regard. Conversely, it would be a mistake to assume that because he has learned something in an academic sense he can then be left to his discretion to carry through as appropriate.

His attention to security will be compounded of natural suspiciousness, personal fears and anxieties, and status needs: the Libyan is both self-protective and self-assertive. Ordinarily he will not do anything which he recognizes is a personal risk; but he may underestimate the risk involved in bragging about his accomplishments and associations. However subtle the approach, the best means of keeping him discreet would seem to be "to scare hell out of him."

### *Controls*

As already noted, the best control over the Libyan agent is the quality of his personal relationship with his case officer. To the extent that the case officer is the One Man who has understood him, respected him, been fair to him, trusted him, etc., etc. (a condition which must be developed over time and at the expenditure of much Christian Virtue, tongue-biting, cheek-turning, and pride-swallowing), the Libyan can be loyal, dedicated, earnest, and sincere. He will remain sensi-

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tive and thin-skinned, however; and while it is permissible and appropriate for the case officer to be firm and legalistic, he must scrupulously avoid slights, insults, and humiliations.

Reaching an agreement with the Libyan with respect to conditions of employment, as in the task briefing, is affected by his capacity to rationalize and be specific, legalistic, or interpretive as suits his interest, and by the fact that he is oriented toward the future while dominated by the present. His assertion of Word and Honor is earnest enough, but it does not connote the same specificity and quid-pro-quo as to the Westerner. While being honorable in fulfilling an obligation he retains a capacity for continually reinterpreting the meaning and expectations of the commitment. For example, he can insist on being paid "as agreed" even though his productivity for a particular period is nil, or he can insist on the adequacy of an inadequate product by debating the criteria, the circumstances, etc.

An agreement to pay a specified amount for general services to be rendered therefore invites an inadequate product and leaves the case officer no recourse against the agent's insistence that he did what was required. Similarly, a guaranteed salary against tasks "to be defined" invites a continuing reduction of effort or insistence on increasing pay for allegedly increasing requirements. Insofar as possible, the whole scope of tasks, duties, and expectations should be laid out in detail at the beginning. Otherwise the later elaboration of duties can be construed as new requirements over and above the initial agreement.

Perhaps the best payment-for-value control exists in a graduated piece-work arrangement within which payment depends on the effectiveness with which various criteria are met. This will not eliminate haggling but at least confines it to specifics and provides the case officer a basis for educating his agent in what is expected of him. Escrow accounts have a carrot-and-stick value provided precautions are taken against any implications of automatic payment; and they should be embellished with bank books or other concrete devices to give the agent satisfaction in the "now" while encouraging him to continue producing.

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## *The Libyan*

Contracts are at least an ambivalent and at best a marginal form of control. In his system of values, a Libyan's Word is his Honor. Whatever the reservations in an Arab's use of these terms, his Word is therefore as binding as any formal agreement; and he may construe insistence on a contract as an affront to his integrity. On the other hand, some contracts play a part in his own legal structure (as witness the marriage contract), and to some Libyans this formalization of the agreement may have a reifying value. In this sense it is worth pursuing. If obtained, it remains a reference point (though not necessarily a binding one) in future haggling: it is at least a way of reminding him of what he agreed to "once," notwithstanding all the changes which he will note have since taken place. Contracts are thus worth getting if it can be done easily, but there is not enough intrinsic control value in them to risk damaging the relationship in going after them.

The ability to conduct surveillance (technically, or with third-nationals, in view of the difficulty of managing a Libyan surveillance team) can be a real asset to the case officer. Since the immediate circumstances, rather than requirements and agreements, have the greatest bearing on the Libyan's behavior when on target, it follows that he has little guilt, little anxiety, little conscience about not following through precisely as expected. He sees nothing wrong in doing something wrong or in rationalizing or lying about it; the only thing wrong is to get caught at it. Surveillance brings him closer to being caught at it, and with a little conditioning of this kind he may develop a substitute conscience, a big-brother-is-watching-me concern which may make the case officer's admonitions and requirements more binding in the action situation.

Application of the polygraph as a control mechanism is particularly complicated with Libyans. The mere introduction of the device constitutes a personal threat, an insult, a questioning of his integrity; if this is true in general, it is more intensely so with Libyans because of the particular emotionalism and defensiveness with which they regard such matters as Word, Honor, and Trust. The situation is patently paradoxical: the Libyan cannot tolerate an objective test of

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these qualities, knowing that they will be found in some ways lacking; the very strength of the polygraph is thus its greatest threat, constituting a risk to the relationship. The implication of mistrust and rejection can mean to the agent that the case officer is, after all, no better than all the other people in the world he's never been able to get along with.

Aside from this very personal and very emotional reaction to the use of the polygraph, there will be room for considerable confusion in the interrogation in identifying what the Libyan is reacting to. Within his over-all emotional reaction his specific reactions can be very equivocal because the values on which they are based can be quite different from the values inferred by his managers. It will require a great deal of cultural as well as personal insight to know what he feels guilty about; he is not likely to be defensive about many things which the case officer feels are important, and he may be very defensive about things the case officer is unaware of or regards as insignificant.

There may be some value in introducing the machine lightly, with no intention of really probing, in order to expose the agent to this aspect of the case officer's armament—not to threaten him, but to reveal the potentiality of the threat. But for conventional applications, if it is necessary to test the agent but also to preserve the relationship, it is best if possible to use procedures which keep the case officer out of the picture.

The Libyan is vulnerable to blackmail because of his sensitivity about his reputation and public image. For most Libyans guilt is associated with being caught and exposed; all will rail against an exposed culprit. The important thing for the blackmailer is to choose a circumstance which represents a violation of the Libyan's moral code, since many things which are wrong to the Westerner are of little significance to him.